



Economic and Social Council

Provisional

21 September 2004

Original: English

Substantive session of 2004
Humanitarian affairs segment

Provisional summary record of the 38th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 14 July 2004, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Penjo (Vice-President)..... (Bhutan)

Contents

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (*continued*)

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

04-42498 (E)



In the absence of the President, Mr. Penjo (Bhutan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (continued)

1. **Mr. Egeland** (Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) said that the work of humanitarians had become more difficult, intricate and unsafe. The agencies operating on the frontlines of humanitarian response — the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Population Fund, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the non-governmental organizations — must operate daily in what had become fragile and uncertain environments. The hard work and sacrifices of colleagues in the field had enabled the humanitarians' life-saving efforts to succeed.
2. The humanitarian community must broaden ownership and support for humanitarian activities. The United Nations system needed improved collaboration and dialogue with Member States. The offices and agencies operating on the ground must seek a more active role from regional organizations and better alliances with national and local non-governmental organizations and develop a more systematic basis for their engagement. He said that he would give particular attention to building partnerships with Islamic organizations in the coming months.
3. Natural disasters increasingly threatened the lives and livelihoods of those living in poor countries and could, in an instant, wipe out development gains that might have taken decades to achieve. The picture of the international community's ability to respond was mixed. On the one hand, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group and the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) Team had successfully developed fast and sophisticated international response networks. On the other hand, for slow-onset and recurring disasters, such as the multifaceted disasters in southern African countries, fielding an UNDAC team was not the solution. Such a complex and chronic problem required a cohesive and
- multifaceted response that needed to draw on all parts of the United Nations system and all humanitarian partners.
4. The international community must prioritize national capacity-building, recognize and utilize local resources and foster community response. Family, neighbours and communities had provided the first line of defence in the aftermath of the Bam earthquake. Impressive local disaster response teams in India, Nepal and Bangladesh were currently coping with monsoon flooding, heavy landslides and the human toll that they exacted.
5. The humanitarian community must build on the lessons learned at Bam and follow the example set by colleagues in South Asia by investing in preparedness and training for national, local and community groups so that countries were not caught unprepared when the next disaster struck. There was a need to think beyond disaster emergency management and spend more time planning and funding post-disaster transition. Neglecting the long-term recovery phase in the wake of a natural disaster was a lost opportunity to improve development practices and ultimately reduce risk. It had been suggested that recovery and risk reduction should be built into country development plans and legislation and the good humanitarian donorship principles extended to disasters long after the initial damage had been done.
6. The humanitarian community needed to identify its natural disaster assistance needs and map out how it translated aspirations into action. The 2004 edition of "Living with Risk: A Global Review of Disaster Reduction Initiatives" gave a hundred examples of how local communities had undertaken successful disaster prevention efforts.
7. Humanitarians had always worked in dangerous environments, but the threat of deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers in several countries had become more serious. They were becoming soft-skinned, high-yield targets and required much more than compliance with minimum operating security standards to guarantee their safety. There was a need to protect the principles necessary for humanitarian operations and to better distinguish the purpose of humanitarians from others doing similar work. As a group, humanitarian workers had reaffirmed the leading role of impartial civilian humanitarian organizations in implementing humanitarian assistance, but had also recognized that,

in some circumstances, they needed the support of military or civil defence assets to accomplish their goals. The humanitarian community must ensure, however, that such support was used in conformity with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles in order to preserve its independence, to uphold its reputation and to protect its staff.

8. There had been discussions about the impact of integrated missions on humanitarian action. Such missions were already in place in many parts of the world, including Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. The Sudan would most likely also have such a mission. While such strategies might bring greater coherence, humanitarian mission principles and responsibilities must be identified and respected when such strategies were applied. There was a need for further study of the impact that integrated missions had on the acceptance by local populations of the humanitarian community and on the ability of humanitarian organizations to operate alongside a military presence.

9. Some of the ideas generated during Council discussions of transition issues over the years had been put into practice in 2004. During informal discussions on transition issues, representatives from the Liberian Government and United Nations country team in Liberia had described efforts to develop a transition strategy and implementation mechanism. After 10 years of conflict in Sierra Leone, the establishment of a national recovery strategy had resulted in the United Nations Transitional Appeal for Relief and Recovery in Sierra Leone in 2004. There was closer collaboration between the United Nations system and the World Bank on joint needs assessments and the piloting of new funding mechanisms that allowed donors to channel funds more easily to transition activities.

10. None of those processes, however, was perfect and there was still much to do. The humanitarian community must harmonize its planning and fund-raising tools, bring about more coherence in its needs assessments and match local ownership with local institution-building so that national actors could be involved from the beginning. There was a need to apply its transition planning and funding strategies to countries recovering from natural disasters.

11. The informal panel on gender had discussed not only the varying effects of conflict and disaster on men and women, boys and girls, but had also highlighted the important role that women played in all

emergencies. Women were often the first to provide assistance and support in a natural disaster, as was the case with the mothers who pulled children from the rubble seconds after the Bam earthquake. Women continually contributed to conflict resolution and peace-building through initiatives such as the people-to-people peace movement run by women in the southern Sudan. Such stories were a reminder that it was time to take gender mainstreaming out of the planning and political arena and bring it into the real world. Designing humanitarian programmes and activities based on a proper analysis of gender must be automatic in order to meet humanitarian needs more effectively. Lives could not be saved unless gender was taken into consideration.

12. Many delegations had raised their voices against sexual violence in war and some had characterized it as a crime against humanity. The Secretary-General's bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse had been applauded, and many had called for action to extend the standards contained in the bulletin to uniformed personnel serving under the United Nations flag. It was encouraging to hear from the Governments of Ghana and Zambia, both major troop-contributing nations to United Nations peacekeeping operations, that they took such standards seriously and would continue to respect the prevailing codes for their own armed forces and police officers.

13. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had no intention of interfering in the affairs of Member States, but it must take care to safeguard its overall reputation by promoting standards for all of those working for and alongside the United Nations in times of crisis.

14. The humanitarian community must strengthen its ability to assist the high numbers of internally displaced persons and it accepted the challenge put forth by Member States to work towards greater coherence as a United Nations system, to implement successfully a collaborative approach to those who had been internally displaced and to ensure that the coordination of assistance to internally displaced persons was translated into tangible improvements on the ground.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.